

HAZLITT AND THE MONARCHY

Legitimacy, Radical Print Culture, and Caricature

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When I was invited by Greg Dart to speak at the Hazlitt Society's annual Day-school in 2015 I realized that I had never given a paper solely on Hazlitt; although I had used him extensively in my published work, this was always in support of other authors and topics. I accepted Greg's invitation with relish and embraced the opportunity to discuss one of Hazlitt's and my own bêtes noires: the monarchy. However, the prospect of initiation into the Hazlitt Society also filled me with a certain trepidation as I became aware that the keynote speaker was none other than Kevin Gilmartin who would be talking about his excellent new book *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (2015). While I was keen to get Kevin to sign a copy of his book, I was also aware that the concluding section of his study is precisely about Hazlitt's views on monarchy. Yet this seemed to me a fortunate coincidence and clear evidence that both of us regarded this theme as in many ways a litmus test or crystallization of Hazlitt's core political values, principles, and 'good' hatreds. In this essay, which is based on my presentation, I acknowledge Gilmartin's many insights while applying a different methodology and contextual reading, most significantly by framing Hazlitt's anti-monarchical writings within the contexts of caricature prints, radical satire, and the formal processes of radical print culture, and by positing some key intertexts which Gilmartin has overlooked.¹ At the end of the essay I also discuss briefly the radical 'afterlife' of Hazlitt's anti-monarchical writing in the 1830s and the era of Chartism.

Like Gilmartin, I am particularly interested in Hazlitt the journalist and in the ideological function and political efficacy of radical print culture in the Romantic period. This issue was of course Hazlitt's métier but as Gilmartin and other critics have shown, Hazlitt's relationship to journalism was complex and even contradictory. As a professional writer, he felt both the power and the limitations of his medium: on the one hand, there was the sense that print was a direct mode of communication with the reader and the equivalent of having a live audience he could touch, inspire, badger, tease, and mould with his 'dramatic

1 See Kevin Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt: Political Essayist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 273–89.

utterance[s]’;² on the other hand, there was the awareness that readers occupied a highly mediated position in a commercial market subject to multiple pressures, allures, and viewpoints that could draw them away from his various political and cultural agendas. Moreover, Hazlitt’s conflicted feelings about journalistic identity were intensified by the fact that he eschewed organized oppositional politics. This meant that he was essentially a print activist, reliant on the page, not the platform, to influence public opinion.³ The frustrations of having to conduct his political edification remotely may explain some of his characteristic volte faces and tirades regarding the democratic health of the reading public during a period of thwarted radical reform.

As Gilmartin shows in great detail, Hazlitt’s inconsistencies make him a fascinating and intriguing writer who wrestled with the gap between the Whiggish, enlightened ideal of the press as (in his own words) ‘the great organ of intellectual improvement and civilisation’ and the blockages and reversals on the ground: not only the stalled pace of political reform but also the lag or uneven development between political and cultural advancement (xiii, 38).⁴ For Hazlitt, the former was barely worth granting without a citizenry sufficiently educated and cultured to appreciate that art is the quintessence of civilization. Hence his advocacy of restricted access to art galleries has drawn fire from critics for its elitism: as he puts it notoriously in his essay ‘Fine Arts. Whether They are Promoted by Academies and Public Institutions’ (1814), ‘The principle of universal suffrage, however applicable to matters of government, which concern the common feelings and common interests of society, is by no means applicable to matters of taste, which can only be decided upon by the most refined understandings’ (xviii, 46). But this animus towards the popular was also fuelled by his keen realization that culture in its widest sense – the system of symbolic or second order codes in a society – was rarely separable from ideological interests. As much as Hazlitt clung to a liberal-humanist ideal of a benign and beneficial higher realm of aesthetics whose blessings could eventually be disseminated throughout society, he was daily confronted by his nemesis: the irrational, spectacular attachment of the people to the debased institution of the monarchy, a cult of myth, glamour, romance, and quasi-divine reverence which was the antitype of a virtuous, republican culture. The question ‘What is the People’ was inseparable from another question: ‘what is the monarchy, and how does it sustain its hold over the people?’ Unless this latter question could be answered satisfactorily, Hazlitt’s vision of a nation purged of political corruption and ‘mass loyalty’ could never be realized.⁵

Hazlitt wrote two key essays on the monarchy: ‘Coriolanus’, a review of Philip Kemble’s production of the play which was first published in the *Examiner* in

2 Jon Cook in ‘Introduction’, *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings* (World’s Classics), ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), xxviii–ix.

3 Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 228–9.

4 All quotations from Hazlitt are taken from *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: J. M. Dent, 1930–4). References are by volume and page.

5 Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt*, 273.

December 1816 and subsequently reprinted in *Characters of Shakespear's Plays* in 1817; and 'On the Spirit of Monarchy', published in John Hunt's periodical *The Liberal* in late 1822. In addition to denunciations of tyranny and arbitrary rule, both essays contain quite damning portrayals of what we might call 'monarchism' or the public's susceptibility to admire supreme power. 'Coriolanus' is the more notorious and celebrated of the essays as it takes a surprising turn in its analysis of the play's politics and accuses Shakespeare, poetry, and by implication ourselves of elitism and power-worship; this tendency is nothing less than a desertion of the democratic principles of republicanism that Hazlitt associates with prose and rational discourse. 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' also includes some surprises, notably an argument that we naturally admire monarchy as it is a projection or sublimation of our ideal selves, a hyperbolic expression of egotism. These provocative, even outrageous formulations are classic instances of Hazlittian idiosyncratic writing, but rather than try to penetrate the mysteries of Hazlitt's political imagination, as numerous critics have done, I want to take a different approach and shed new light on these and other essays by considering some of the external events, contexts, and intertexts that made the topic of monarchy so conspicuous and urgent for Hazlitt and the radical movement.

The beast of Legitimacy and Gothic Spain

My narrative of Hazlitt's war against the monarchy begins paradoxically in the year of Peace, 1814. While national celebrations and festivities took place outside his lodgings in London (as it happened these were premature, but no one could have predicted Napoleon's Hundred Days at this time), Hazlitt was seething at the restoration of Bourbon rule in Spain and France. While this reversal was clearly a major blow to his political hopes, the betrayal of the Spanish and French people by the Allied powers turned Hazlitt into a 'good hater' (vii, 151) of monarchy and fed his hyperbolic portrayal of the monster of Legitimacy, the revamping of Divine Right.⁶ We can only imagine his feelings as he watched the Prince Regent and the Tsar of Russia take part in a victory parade directly beneath his curtainless rooms overlooking St James's Park in the summer of 1814.⁷ According to Tom Paulin, Hazlitt's mood in this bleak postwar period was so 'excited, desperate, tormented' that a 'wild Protestant populist atavism howl[ed] through Hazlitt's prose' as he identified with the persecuted victims of Catholic Spain and France.⁸ This may explain why he inflated the bogey of Legitimacy into an all-consuming evil, the

6 'Even when the spirit of the age (that is, the progress of intellectual refinement, warring with our natural infirmities) no longer allows us to carry our vindictive and headstrong humours into effect, we try to revive them in description, and keep up the old bugbears, the phantoms of our terror and hate, in imagination' ('On the Pleasure of Hating'; xii, 128–9).

7 Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 150–1.

8 Tom Paulin, *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style* (London: Faber, 1998), 39–40.

'bloated hideous form [...] that claims mankind as its property, [...] that haunts the understanding like a frightful spectre' (vii, 259–60).

Gilmartin shows convincingly how Hazlitt constructed a demonological fantasy of omnipotent absolutism against which he could define his heroic resistance,⁹ but it is also important to note that in these bristling, venomous, and often highly entertaining assaults, Hazlitt conveniently blurred the boundaries between Europe and Britain. For Hazlitt, Ferdinand VII of Spain, Louis XVIII of France, and the other despots of the Holy Alliance provided spectacular and incontrovertible evidence that monarchs naturally gravitated towards tyranny. But Britain's more modern system of limited monarchy, a system which even Thomas Paine admitted contained republican elements of an elected government and a separation of powers, could only be included in this foul company by association rather than definition. More often than not, Hazlitt simply tarred all monarchs with the same melodramatic brush. In a later essay 'Whether Genius is Conscious of Its Powers' (1826) he recalled that in 1814 'there was but one alternative – the cause of kings or of mankind'. There was no rejoicing when 'the Mighty [Napoleon] fell':

we, all men, fell with him, like lightning from heaven, to grovel in the grave of Liberty, in the sty of Legitimacy! There is but one question in the hearts of monarchs, whether mankind are their property or not. There was but this one question in mine. I made an abstract, metaphysical principle of this question. [...] By my hatred of tyrants I knew what their hatred of the free-born spirit of man must be, of the semblance, of the very name of Liberty and Humanity. And while others bowed their heads to the image of the BEAST, I spit upon it and buffeted it, and made mouths at it, and pointed at it, and drew aside the veil that then half concealed it [...]. (xii, 122)

This visceral response to the return of the Bourbons may well have been influenced by the caricature prints, which specialized in grotesque transformations of political affairs. As Baudelaire was later to say, the 'distinctive' quality of the Golden Age of political cartoons was the 'inexhaustible abundance of grotesque invention' realized in the 'extravagant violence of gesture and movement, and the intensity of expression. All [the] little figures mime with furious vigour and boisterousness, like actors in a pantomime'.¹⁰ Caricaturists seized on any opportunity to present unjust political power as violent, Gothic melodrama. By early 1815, Ferdinand had already begun to replace Napoleon in the popular visual imagination as *the* bloodthirsty despot, a 'BEAST' of backwardness and tyranny. Whereas Louis XVIII tended to be portrayed in political cartoons as a bloated buffoon (Hazlitt called him a 'scare-crow'; vii, 151), Ferdinand personified the

9 According to Gilmartin, Hazlitt and other radical journalists inflated the menace of the 'post-revolutionary state authority in Europe' into a 'nightmarish' fantasy of 'oppressive power that extended through time and space and left nothing outside its reach' (*William Hazlitt*, 111–20).

10 Charles Baudelaire, 'Some Foreign Caricaturists' (1857) in *Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, ed. P. E. Charvet (Penguin, 1972), 234.



Figure 1 Thomas Rowlandson, *The Privy Council of a King* (1815). © Trustees of the British Museum

revival of ‘Gothic’ Spain of the Black Legend. In Thomas Rowlandson’s *The Privy Council of a King* (1815), for example, Ferdinand sits on a toilet-throne which rests on a base of skulls while reactionary religious and political cronies preach counter-revolution and oppression (Figure 1). For Hazlitt, Ferdinand was the essence of recidivist Legitimacy:

When we see a poor creature like Ferdinand VII., who can hardly gabble out his words like a human being, more imbecile than a woman, more hypocritical than a priest, decked and dandled in the long robes and swaddling-clothes of Legitimacy, lullabied to rest with the dreams of superstition, drunk with the patriot-blood of his country, and launching the thunders of his coward-arm against the rising liberties of a new world, while he claims the style and title of Image of the Divinity, we may laugh or weep, but there is nothing to wonder at. (vii, 285)

Like many radicals, Hazlitt followed the rollercoaster political fortunes of Spain closely: aligning himself ironically with Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, he railed,

This subject of Spanish liberty and deliverance is one that we dwell upon with willingness. ‘It feeds fat the ancient grudge we owe’ to hereditary tyranny and its pitiful tools’. (xix, 154n)



Figure 2 William Hone and George Cruikshank, *A Slap at Slop* (August 1821)

He was appalled by the shocking apostasy of the Spanish people in embracing Ferdinand in 1814 and again in 1823 after the crushing of the liberal Cortes by the Holy Alliance.

These events and their representations in the radical press and caricature provide a dramatic political context for Hazlitt's two key essays on the monarchy. From his perspective, Britain was guilty by association of legitimist tendencies. The political betrayal of Spain by the Allies (no matter how predisposed its people were to worship absolutism) was also for liberals and radicals the betrayal of the British people who had supported the expulsion of Napoleonic tyranny in the name of Spanish freedom, only to see 'old' dictatorship restored (the cant loyalist phrase in 1814 was the 'Good Old Times').¹¹ But once the reform movement at home revived after 1815 and the government began to crack down on civil liberties, the Spanish imbroglio began to seem uncomfortably relevant. Although backward Spain was an extreme case of inquisitorial injustice, radical pressmen such as William Hone drew vivid parallels between domestic and foreign oppression, particularly after the Peterloo massacre of 1819.

The most spectacular rendition of this conjunction was George Cruikshank's satirical cartoon *Damnable Association* which appeared in Hone's satirical newspaper *A Slap at Slop* in 1821 (Figure 2).¹² The image shows conservative British politicians and their fellow conspirators in despotic Europe torturing the naked female figure of Liberty in a dungeon and burning the free press. Given Hazlitt's collaboration with Hone at this time, it is hard not to conclude that this lurid yet witty Gothic iconography would have struck a chord. In *Political Essays*, published by Hone in 1819, Hazlitt had already drawn on the reportage and imagery of inquisitorial persecution to expose Southey's apostasy. For Hazlitt, continuing support for reform in Spain and at home was the litmus test of political and literary integrity:

11 See a satirical poem called 'The Good Old Times', *Morning Chronicle*, 13 June 1814.

12 See Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter 6 (121–40).



Figure 3 George Cruikshank, *Twelfth Night* (1814) © Trustees of the British Museum

It was understood to be for his exertions in the cause of Spanish liberty that he was made Poet-Laureate. It is then high time for him to resign. Why has he not written a single ode to a single Spanish patriot who has been hanged, banished, imprisoned, sent to the galleys, assassinated, tortured? (vii, 95)

Shakespeare and the spectacle of politics

If the Gothic Spain of the political cartoons was a fertile source of imagery for Hazlitt's construction of despotic monstrosity, another powerful influence on his anti-monarchical imagination could have been the caricature depictions of the Congress of Vienna as vaudeville and pantomime (Figure 3). It is important to note that the lampooning of postwar realpolitik as theatre and performance coincided with Hazlitt's lectures and essays on Shakespeare in which some of his seminal 'dramatic utterance[s]' on monarchy appear, including 'Coriolanus'. The parallels between the plays and contemporary political events are for the most part implicit and contextual but occasionally they become explicit. In his lecture on *Henry V*, Hazlitt criticizes the king's invasion of France as a reflex of 'kingly power' and the 'right divine of kings to govern wrong' (iv, 286).¹³ He then makes a republican joke about the Bourbon Restoration:

¹³ Hazlitt used the same phrase in 'What is the People' (1817): see vii, 264. William Hone borrowed it for the title of one of his own satires (1821).

The object of our late invasion and conquest of France was to restore the legitimate monarch, the descendant of Hugh Capet, to the throne: Henry v. in his time made war on and deposed the descendant of this very Hugh Capet, on the plea that he was a usurper and illegitimate. What would the great modern catspaw of legitimacy and restorer of divine right have said, to the claim of Henry and the title of the descendants of Hugh Capet? (iv, 286)

This witty debunking of the play's jingoism is extended when Hazlitt asserts that any admiration we have for Henry is restricted solely to the theatrical experience:

We like him in the play. There he is a very amiable monster, a very splendid pageant. As we like to gaze at a panther or a young lion in their cages in the Tower, and catch a pleasing horror from their glistening eyes, their velvet paws, and dreadless roar, so we take a very romantic, heroic, patriotic, and poetical delight in the boasts and feats of our younger Harry, as they appear on the stage and are confined to lines of ten syllables; where no blood follows the stroke that wounds our ears, where no harvest bends beneath horses' hoofs, no city flames, no little child is butchered, no dead men's bodies are found piled on heaps and festering the next morning – in the orchestra! (iv, 286)

The closing macabre witticism is a typical example of Hazlitt pushing his relentless logic to an absurd, even surreal extreme and collapsing the antithetical trope that underpins his assertions. The basis of his critique is to utilize the dualism of mimesis and distinguish between theatrical illusion (the monarchy as a spectacle) and real history (the warmongering of kingcraft), yet the frisson of the concluding joke relies on the imagination refusing to sustain the separation. At a deeper level this could be Hazlitt's grotesque mimesis of the deleterious consequences of the public's faith in the monarchy, of refusing to place rational boundaries round the institution and failing to judge it by its violent policies. The 'festering' consequence of royalist delusion is the spectral contamination of art and culture by conservative ideology, dead bodies having replaced the musicians in the orchestra, Shakespeare's patriotic hero mistaken for a real king. This disaster reaches its devastating climax in 'Coriolanus' where Hazlitt shames the whole of history as a 'royal hunt' of the strong against the weak:

The history of mankind is a romance, a mask, a tragedy, constructed upon the principles of *poetical justice*; it is a noble or royal hunt, in which what is sport to the few is death to the many, and in which the spectators halloo and encourage the strong to set upon the weak, and cry havoc in the chase though they do not share in the spoil. We may depend upon it that what men delight to read in books, they will put in practice in reality. (iv, 216)

This makes for uncomfortable reading: everyone is tainted by this unseemly sport, either as a bawling spectator of elite power or a dupe of mainstream print

culture. To rub salt in the wound, the phrase 'cry havoc' recalls Mark Anthony's rabble-rousing speech from *Julius Caesar* Act III Scene 1 in which the fickle mob are easily manipulated into abandoning their allegiance to the republican rebellion led by Brutus and Cassius.

If Hazlitt's ironic use of the collective pronoun ('We like him in the play') is prepared to cede a purely symbolic, theatrical role for Henry V and the monarchy ('a very splendid pageant'), his judgement of Henry VIII is much harsher, refusing him any role on the public stage. In this declamation, monarchical history is simply too horrific to be performed as entertainment or turned into art:

Kings ought never to be seen upon the stage. In the abstract, they are very disagreeable characters: it is only while living that they are 'the best of kings'. It is their power, their splendour, it is the apprehension of the personal consequences of their favour or their hatred that dazzles the imagination and suspends the judgment of their favourites or their vassals; but death cancels the bond of allegiance and of interest; and seen *as they were*, their power and their pretensions look monstrous and ridiculous. [...] No reader of history can be a lover of kings. We have often wondered that Henry VIII. as he is drawn by Shakespear, and as we have seen him represented in all the bloated deformity of mind and person, is not hooted from the English stage. (iv, 305–6)

In this tirade the trope of theatrical illusion is displaced onto the court system which is already and essentially a spectacle. As in the Congress of Vienna caricatures, Hazlitt emphasizes that monarchical power relies on 'pageantry' to mask its true ('abstract') deformity. The equivalent of a theatrical audience who 'suspend' their disbelief is now the fawning court, the 'favourites' and 'vassals' who are willing dupes and lickspittles of royal 'dazzle'. But once this bond of 'allegiance and interest' is broken by the death of the monarch, the 'monstrous and ridiculous' reality is revealed.

In his allusion to death as a levelling force Hazlitt may have been influenced by the Romantic revival of the Dance of Death and in particular its prolific use by caricaturists: Thomas Rowlandson's popular series the *English Dance of Death* (1814–16), for example, overlapped with Hazlitt's Shakespearean writings.¹⁴ But unlike the ironic inclusiveness of Henry V's admirers, Henry VIII provokes the intervention of the dissenting, republican reader: 'No reader of history can be a lover of kings'. Sound education is a shield against royalist jiggery-pokery, what Paine called the 'master fraud'. From this enlightened, high-minded vantage point, Hazlitt wittily imagines a revolutionary *coup d'état*: in general, 'Kings ought never to be seen upon the stage', and in particular the 'bloated' Henry VIII (surely an echo of the 'voluptuary' Prince Regent as represented by Gillray and Cruikshank) should be 'hooted from the English stage'.¹⁵

14 Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature*, chapter 4 (74–99).

15 James Gillray's *A Voluptuary Under the Horrors of Digestion* (1792) was adapted by George Cruikshank in 'Qualification', an illustration in William Hone and Cruikshank's

‘Cross readings’

Leaving aside explicit analogies, another intriguing way in which we can see Hazlitt’s Shakespearian criticism interacting with contemporary political events is to revisit the formal organization of the Regency newspaper and consider the synergies and new readings that can emerge from the spatial proximity of seemingly unrelated articles. The first example of this inconsequential hermeneutics occurs on the front page of the *Examiner* issue of 15 December 1816 in which ‘Coriolanus’ first appeared. It is surely no coincidence that the front page contained Hazlitt’s unattributed article ‘On Modern Apostates’ in which he lampoons Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge for becoming ‘converts to the cause of kings’ and ‘hired pimps and panders of power’ (vii, 132). This invective sets the tone for the whole issue. As David Higgins comments perceptively, when ‘Coriolanus’ appears some pages later, ‘Hazlitt is so politically sensitive that even the “protean” Shakespeare is represented as a sort of apostate.’¹⁶ In other words, Shakespeare is made to conform to the spirit of the Romantic age and to undergo a democracy health check which, like his central character, he fails calamitously. Hazlitt’s hyperbolic reaction to Coriolanus’s famous dismissal of the popular will is to reduce history and culture to a Manichean struggle between the forces of rationality and humanity and the ‘royal hunt’ of monarchical superstition. In literary terms, the republican prose of the heroic liberal press (his own medium) is pitted against ‘right-royal’ poetry which is associated with a reactionary literary establishment and its headline apostates the Lake poets:

The language of poetry naturally falls in with the language of power. [...] The understanding is a dividing and measuring faculty [...]. The one is an aristocratical, the other a republican faculty. The principle of poetry is a very anti-levelling principle. [...] It rises above the ordinary standards of sufferings and crimes. It presents a dazzling appearance. It shows its head turretted, crowned, and crested. Its front is guilt and blood-stained. Before it ‘it carries noise, and behind it tears.’ It has its altars and its victims, sacrifices, human sacrifices. Kings, priests, nobles, are its trainbearers, tyrants and slaves its executioners. – ‘Carnage is its daughter.’ – Poetry is right-royal. (iv, 214)

The ‘royal hunt’ of unjust history is the apotheosis of this dismal ‘logic of the imagination and of the passions’. The conclusion of Hazlitt’s tidal flow of rhetoric is that English culture has willingly succumbed to Bourbonization: ‘wrong dressed out in pride, pomp, and circumstance, has more attraction than abstract right’ (iv, 215). This vision of national apostasy expresses Hazlitt’s profound disillusionment with the Regency settlement in the wake of Napoleon’s defeat.

The sweeping condemnation of poetry in ‘Coriolanus’ has rightly provoked critical controversy and is often dismissed as inconsistent or hypocritical: just two years later, for example, Hazlitt wrote in ‘On Poetry in General’: ‘He who has

The Queen’s Matrimonial Ladder (1820).

16 David Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine* (London: Routledge, 2005), 106.

a contempt for poetry, cannot have much respect for himself, or for any thing else' (v, 1). Nevertheless, the tirade is a remarkable politicization of Shakespeare which derives its power less from its critical accuracy than its engagement with the immediate political context; it is also worth adding that he may have been exploiting the play's already controversial reputation, it having been banned in 1797 for its 'dangerous tendency' of showing a rebellious people facing up to their rulers.¹⁷ Hazlitt's anti-monarchical offensive appeared in the midst of a massive resurgence of the reform movement. Just before the essay was published a mass protest at Spa Fields in London resulted in a riot and the subsequent execution of a demonstrator. The next example of inconsequential interpretation will show how this context or (in its material form) paratext effectively allegorized Shakespeare's play and transformed it into a fable of Regency injustice.

'Coriolanus' first appeared in the *Examiner* on the same page as a report of a delegation from the Corporation of London petitioning the Prince Regent:

Our grievances are the natural effect of rash and ruinous wars, unjustly commenced, and pertinaciously persisted in when no rational object was to be obtained; of immense subsidies to Foreign Powers [...], of an unconstitutional and unprecedented military force in time of peace [...] all arising from the corrupt and inadequate state of the Representation of the People in Parliament.¹⁸

The report is in the left-hand column, 'Coriolanus' in the right. Normally the reader would proceed vertically down each column and keep the two articles distinct, but their spatial contiguity creates the possibility of lateral reading in which discourses unexpectedly collide and illuminate each other. Gilmartin has shown that such 'cross-reading' was a well-established practice among radical readers: often merely done for fun, this 'hermeneutic of reversal' could also yield subversive readings of topical events and bring 'the disruptive energy of radical satire' into the 'core, news content' of the newspaper.¹⁹ Hence if the two texts are read in parallel it becomes apparent that the people's 'grievances' in 1816 provide a contemporary analogue for the play's political themes. Hazlitt's claim that the play is a political education in its own right – a 'store-house of political common-places' which can save the reader 'the trouble of reading Burke's *Reflections* or Paine's *Rights of Man*' – seems at first sight to undermine his attack on Shakespeare's elitism. But as the report of the petition continues, the parallels between the Prince Regent and Shakespeare's hero become compelling. The Prince's response to the people's petitioning of the monarch (which was one of the most fundamental constitutional rights of the British political system) is a refusal to intervene: his address, published verbatim, states that economic difficulties are the

17 The phrase 'dangerous tendency' is Joanna Baillie's, cited in Jonathan Sachs, *Romantic Antiquity: Rome in the British Imagination 1798–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 201.

18 *The Examiner* 468 (15 December 1816), 792.

19 Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, 95–6.

result of 'unavoidable causes'. His main concern is not the Corn Laws and starvation but discontent: only renewed loyalty and the 'enlightened benevolence' of parliament will ensure public safety.²⁰ The report concludes with a telling detail: the Prince 'partook of an early dinner, and left Carlton House on his return to Brighton'. The Prince Regent retreats to his pleasure palace, leaving the political stage vacant for his counterpart Coriolanus who succeeds him in the next article. The alert radical reader would surely have perceived (and relished) the similarities. Coriolanus joins the rogue's gallery of monstrous Legitimists.²¹

This subversive interleaving of reportage and theatre criticism may be an unintentional product of the periodical format (there is no way to know if editorial cunning lay behind the juxtapositions) but the synergies and cross-currents are clearly there. For Jonathan Bate, who regards 'Coriolanus' as a 'one of the crucial texts of the age' in its analysis of the relations between politics and art, there is no question that Hazlitt was consciously Jacobinizing Shakespeare by evoking parallels with the repressive postwar political climate. Bate notes that Hazlitt's critics certainly saw things this way. William Gifford, for example, claimed that Hazlitt had 'libelled our great poet as a friend of arbitrary power'. Hazlitt's response was apposite: 'Do you then really admire those plague spots of history, and scourges of human nature, Richard I, Richard II, King John, and Henry VIII?'²²

20 Jonathan Bate sees an echo of the Corn Laws in the play's opening depiction of the starving populace (*Shakespearian Constitutions: Politics, Theatre, Criticism 1730–1830* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], 164–75).

21 One objection to this allegorical reading of 'Coriolanus' could be that it ignores Hazlitt's theory of the universal 'admiration of power', a phrase he uses in 'On the Connexion between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants' (1817), an essay that reiterates many of the bitter condemnations of 'On Modern Apostates'. If it is really the case that 'the greater the lie, the more enthusiastically it is believed and greedily swallowed', then it is hard to have any sympathy for the oppressed masses who are the ideological fodder of powerful leaders:

So we feel some concern for the poor citizens of Rome when they meet together to compare their wants and grievances, till Coriolanus comes in and with blows and big words drives this set of 'poor rats', this rascal scum, to their homes and beggary before him. There is nothing heroic in a multitude of miserable rogues not wishing to be starved, or complaining that they like to be so: but when a single man comes forward to brave their cries and to make them submit to the last indignities, from mere pride and self-will, our admiration of his prowess is immediately converted into contempt for their pusillanimity. (iv, 215)

Even in the context of Hazlitt's and the *Examiner's* liberal reservations about the 'multitude' flexing its muscles in a divided country, this seems an unduly harsh assessment of popular protest and an ironic redoubling of the elitism supposedly under attack. One way round this problem, as suggested earlier, is that Hazlitt is being ironic and typically provocative, impersonating rather than recommending the dire consequences of hegemonic delusion. The parallels between Coriolanus the 'single man' of 'pride and self-will' and the Prince Regent are glaring and they are all negative.

22 Bate, *Shakespearian Constitutions*, 174–5. Nathan Drake in *Shakespeare and His Times* (1817) refers to the play's 'electioneering mob' (cited Bate, 163).



Figure 4 George Cruikshank, *Coriolanus Addressing the Plebeians* (1820) © Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Coriolanus and the plebeians

The impact of ‘Coriolanus’ can be gauged by the fact that only a few years after its publication the Prince Regent, just one month into his new role as King George IV, appeared literally as Coriolanus in a George Cruikshank caricature, *Coriolanus Addressing the Plebeians* (1820) (Figure 4). The print shows the King berating a motley crowd of radicals and reformers: from agitated and pusillanimous Spenceans on the left through to stolid, defiant and dignified pressmen on the right, including William Hone and Cruikshank himself who is at the extreme edge nearest the viewer. The King declaims the lines from *Coriolanus* Act 1 Scene i, 173–93: ‘What would ye have ye Curs that like not Peace, nor War? [...]/ You cry against the Noble Senate, who (under the Gods,)/ Keep you in awe, which else would feed on one another?’

This print seems to be the perfect illustration of Hazlitt’s theory of ‘right-royal’ poetry spurning democracy, but as Bate argues, beneath the apparent glorification of the king is a ‘profoundly ambivalent’ response. A loyal interpretation of the print, aimed at flattering the new king, has to rely on an ‘over-simplified reading’ of the play that ignores Coriolanus’s ‘peremptory response’ to the demands of the people and the obvious parallels with George IV’s refusal to sanction political reforms in the wake of Peterloo and the Six Acts. For Bate, Hazlitt’s essay had permanently damaged Coriolanus’s reputation, and in effect this made Hazlitt the co-creator of the print. To support this claim further, Bate reminds us that Hazlitt was a colleague of Cruikshank and his collaborator William Hone during their

most prolific period. Hone published *Political Essays* in 1819 just before Peterloo, an event which inspired the phenomenally successful Hone-Cruikshank caricature partnership beginning with *The Political House that Jack Built*.²³ According to Hazlitt's grandson William Carew Hazlitt, the three men would meet regularly at the 'Southampton' public house 'and discuss the subject for Hone's next squib'.²⁴ So, although Hazlitt is not visually present in Cruikshank's *Coriolanus* (probably for the reason that he was not regarded as an activist), Bate concludes that 'both publicly and privately Hazlitt presides over this engraving'.²⁵

In the spirit of Bate's assertion, a fuller Hazlittian reading of the print is possible. The image performs rather than declares its 'ambivalence' about popular politics. In 'Coriolanus' Hazlitt went against the grain of Romantic aesthetics and deflated the sublime spectacle of revolution: 'the tame submission to usurped authority or even the natural resistance to it has nothing to excite or flatter the imagination' (iv, 215). There is some evidence for this withering view of 'resistance' in the cowardly stances of the ultra-radicals on the left of the scene, but not in the stolid poses of Hone and Cruikshank, tribunes of the free press. The figure which most 'flatters the imagination' is the King: not only is his classical demeanour and 'statuesque imperiousness'²⁶ so unlike the usual bloated caricature as to lack credibility, even his facial expression is (to quote Bate) 'smug'.²⁷ Finally, for all its ambivalence, the composition shows the sheer scale of radical activism and radical print culture in the wake of the Six Acts and anticipates their mobilization in the Queen Caroline controversy which was about to erupt.²⁸

This Queen Caroline campaign soon restored George IV to his unflattering caricature identity, and it was in the wake of this furore that Hazlitt submitted 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' to John Hunt in late 1822.²⁹ Hazlitt's second major demolition of monarchism was therefore in tune with popular-radical culture and the last great burst of mass activism before the Reform Bill agitation. The next section of this essay proposes that Hazlitt's decision to write this piece may have been influenced by a remarkable anti-monarchical text which Hone republished in 1821 and which has been overlooked by Hazlitt critics.

23 Ibid, 101-4.

24 Cited in Ben Wilson, *The Laughter of Triumph: William Hone and the Fight for the Free Press* (London: Faber, 2005), 310.

25 Bate, *Shakespearian Constitutions*, 103.

26 Sachs, *Romantic Antiquity*, 204.

27 Ibid, 103.

28 Hazlitt's republicanism made him sceptical about this campaign which he called a 'farce' (cited Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, 272-3).

29 Stanley Jones is wide of the mark when he states that the 'storm of politics had blown over' in 1820 (*Hazlitt*, 306).

The spirit of despotism

In 1821 Hone reprinted a minor classic from the 1790s, Vicesimus Knox's *The Spirit of Despotism*.³⁰ In order to stamp his own identity on the book, Hone replaced Knox's name with 'Edited by the Author of *The Political House that Jack Built*' and even added a satirical vignette. This rebranding made Knox an ally in the campaign against George IV rather than George III. *The Spirit of Despotism* had a cult reputation as it was withdrawn soon after publication in 1795. The original text belonged to a surge of republican denunciations of monarchy including Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791–2), Godwin's *Political Justice* (1793), and Charles Pigott's *Political Dictionary* (1795). But the Treason Trials of 1794 and the Two Acts of 1795 made publishers of radical texts distinctly nervous. Hone makes clear in his Preface that there are chilling parallels between the 1790s and the renewed censorship and ultra-Loyalist campaigns of the post-Peterloo years. It is hard to imagine that Hazlitt would not have been attracted by this text which Hone puffed as a weapon against 'apostacy' and 'sycophantic subserviency'.³¹ The echo of both 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' and *The Spirit of the Age* in the title of Knox's book, to say nothing of the shared interest in debunking the cult of monarchy, brings the texts into close proximity.

Knox's declared politics in the book are very similar to Hazlitt's: he is a reforming Protestant Whig who associates despotism with Jacobitism and Catholicism. One of the values of his book is that it focuses on the British monarchical system which Hazlitt frequently effaces. The danger of the Hanoverian rule for Knox is that the war against France has aggrandized its power and it 'would transfuse the principles of the Stuarts into the bosom of a Brunswick'.³² Blocking reform discourages participation in the public sphere and promotes the 'extension of royalism and the depression of the people'.³³ Knox uses an interesting Enlightenment metaphor to describe his role: he is a 'Political opthalmist' [sic] who must remove the 'gold dust' from people's eyes,³⁴ even in Britain where monarchy is supposedly founded on the 'rock' of Liberty. Knox is clear that if the monarch performs his duties adequately he is entitled to respect or even 'proofs of love and honour, *on this side idolatry*'.³⁵ But unfortunately monarchism has become a quasi-religious cult of devotion, quiescence and abjection, propagated by a 'venal press' who pump out 'daily falsehood' to a 'credulous' readership:³⁶ 'Every stratagem is used to delude the common and unthinking part of the people into a belief, that their only way of

30 Vicesimus Knox, *The Spirit of Despotism* (London: William Hone, 1822).

31 Ibid, vii.

32 Ibid, 125. Hazlitt's use of a very similar phrase ('ingrafting the principles of the House of Stuart on the illustrious stock of the House of Brunswick') in 'What is the People' suggests that he may have known Knox's text (vii, 261).

33 Knox, *Spirit of Despotism*, 37.

34 Ibid, 9.

35 Ibid, 55.

36 Ibid, 42.

displaying loyalty is, to display a most servile obsequiousness to the throne, and to oppose every popular measure.³⁷

These sentiments, which echo Hazlitt's attack on the 'hireling[s] of the press' and the 'intellectual pimp[s] of power' in 'On the Connexion between Toad-Eaters and Tyrants' (1817) (vi, 149), have an obvious relevance for the early 1820s. One of Knox's nicest insights is that such unthinking loyalism actually encourages despotism and undermines 'limited monarchy and constitutional liberty':

I will not pay a limited monarch, at the head of a free people, so ill a compliment, as to treat him as if he were a despot, ruling over a land of slaves. I cannot adopt the spirit of despotism in a land of liberty; and I must reprobate that false, selfish, adulatory loyalty, which, seeking nothing but its own base ends of avarice and ambition, and feeling no real attachment either to the person or the office of the king, contributes nevertheless to diffuse by its example, a servile, abject temper, highly promotive of the despotic spirit.³⁸

Knox's aim is to make 'constitutional liberty' work properly: through a limited extension of the franchise and the abolition of Old Corruption and militarism, Britain can become a bourgeois, meritocratic Utopia:

In a word, – let parliament be reformed. This measure will remove all grievances, and satisfy all demands. It will at once give permanency to the throne, and happiness to the people. Kings will be republicans in the true sense of that term; and the Spirit of Despotism become the Spirit of Philanthropy.³⁹

Hazlitt rarely engaged so directly with Britain's constitutional monarchy, perhaps because its hybrid character as a 'crowned republic' undermined his desire to tar all monarchs with the same despotic brush. Republican polemicists such as Thomas Paine had argued that the key reform was to make the political system more representative through universal suffrage, and to this extent the precise form of the political state was incidental and in theory could even accommodate a limited monarchy. However, all the recent historical evidence pointed towards the incompatibility between the democratic and hereditary elements of the constitution. As Paine argued in *Common Sense* (1776), the use of placemen meant that the 'corrupt influence of the crown' had 'eaten out the virtue of the House of Commons (the republican part of the constitution)'.⁴⁰ Hazlitt followed the same line: monarchical corruption was endemic and irredeemable. In 'On the Regal Character' (1818) he notes that parliament enables some 'sympathy' or communication between monarchs and their subjects, but the more important

37 Ibid, 54.

38 Ibid, 58.

39 Ibid, 56.

40 Thomas Paine, *Common Sense, Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* (London: H. D. Symonds, 1792), 11.

point is that this 'medium' is flimsy; once this 'check upon their ambition and rapacity' is removed, the result is 'monstrous' and 'ridiculous' (vii, 285). Recidivism is Hazlitt's comfort zone: 'what King would not attain absolute power?' Even limited monarchs justify their existence by 'levying cruel wars and undermining the liberties of the world' (vii, 264; xix, 266). But the stubborn popularity of the British monarchy clearly rankled him. According to Linda Colley it was precisely at this time that the 'apotheosis' of the British crown took place: in the face of French aggression, the king became a symbol of the Protestant nation and the personification of Englishness.⁴¹

Hazlitt could only respond to this popularity with exasperation, incredulity, and sarcasm. In 'On The Spirit of Monarchy', for example, he interrupts the flow of his argument with a sardonic interjection. Having launched a familiar accusation that 'the stream of corruption begins at the fountain-head of court-influence' (236), he resorts to bluster:

Phaw! we had forgot – Our British monarchy is a mixed, and the only perfect form of government; and therefore what is here said cannot properly apply to it. But MIGHT BEFORE RIGHT is the motto blazoned on the front of unimpaired and undivided Sovereignty! [...] A constitutional king [...] is a servant of the public, a representative of the people's wants and wishes, dispensing justice and mercy according to law. Such a monarch is the King of England! Such was his late, and such is his present Majesty George the IVth! (xix, 261–3)

The frantic punctuation conveys a mixture of scorn and embarrassment. Britain's exceptionalism is so unpalatable to Hazlitt that he has to rely on exclamatory despair: 'But power is eternal; it is "enthroned in the heart of kings". If you want the proofs, look at history, look at geography, look abroad; but do not look at home!' (vii, 265). The closest that Hazlitt comes to Knox's ideal of a 'republican king' is his notion of a 'patriot King' who has 'the power in imagination of changing places with his people', but this is a faculty which sovereigns 'seldom possess' and no examples are given (vii, 287).

There is much more convergence between Knox and Hazlitt in their shared critique of what Godwin called the 'impudent mysticism' of monarchy.⁴² As Colley has argued, the 'magic' of royal spectacle transformed 'royal ordinariness' into semi-divine status.⁴³ For Knox, royal pageantry is a well-practised political deception:

41 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (1992; New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), chapter 5 (195–236); see also Marilyn Morris, *The British Monarchy and the French Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), chapter 8 (160–87), 'Conclusion' (188–94).

42 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), ed. K. Codell Carter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 198.

43 Colley, *Britons*, 238.

The people, it must be owned, in the simplicity of their hearts, gape with admiration at the passing spectacle which insults them with its glare, and feel themselves awe-struck with the grandeur of the cavalcade, which would trample them in the dirt if they did not struggle to escape. Politicians, observing the effect of finery and parade on the minds of the unthinking, take care to dress up the idol, which they themselves pretend to worship, and which they wish the people really to adore, in all the taudry glitter of the lady of Loretto. They find this kind of vulgar superstition extremely favourable to their interested views.⁴⁴

This could almost be Hazlitt (including the sardonic reference to Catholic superstition). In 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' he launches a withering attack on George IV's coronation in 1821 in very similar terms. Like all such pageants, it 'debauches the understandings of the people, and makes them the slaves of sense and show':

What does it all amount to? A shew – a theatrical spectacle! What does it prove? That a king is crowned, that a king is dead! What is the moral to be drawn from it, that is likely to sink into the heart of a nation? That greatness consists in finery, and that supreme merit is the dower of birth and fortune. (xix, 264)

As Gilmartin points out, such debunking of spectacle was a stock-in-trade of radical analysis, but this does not diminish the eloquence and discursive proximity of Knox's text.⁴⁵ Where Hazlitt departed from Knox and made the critique uniquely his own was in the burrowing down into the deeper psychology of mass delusion. Hazlitt locates a dark secret behind this propensity:

The Spirit of Monarchy then is nothing but the craving in the human mind after the Sensible and the One. It is not so much a matter of state-necessity or policy, as a natural infirmity, a disease, a false appetite in the popular feeling, which must be gratified. [...] Each individual would (were it in his power) be a king, a God: but as he cannot, the next best thing is to see this reflex image of his self-love, the darling passion of his breast, realized, embodied out of himself in the first object he can lay his hands on for the purpose. The slave admires the tyrant, because the last *is*, what the first *would be*. He surveys himself all over in the glass of royalty. (xix, 255)

What Knox called 'idolatry' becomes in Hazlitt the anthropological or ontological equivalent of 'right-royal poetry'. Where Hazlitt once again universalizes this idolatrous tendency, Knox at least emboldens the enlightened, 'unbedizened' reader to see through the delusion. This can be seen in the different ways that both

44 Knox, *Spirit of Despotism*, 53.

45 Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt*, 287–8. Gilmartin discusses John Wade but not Knox.

writers deploy the republican trope of monarchical theatre. Following Paine and Godwin, Knox debunks royal mystique by exposing its tawdry flummery:

The pageantry of life may answer the purpose of the scenery of the play-house, and keep the vulgar from beholding the grandees of the world, before they are dressed and *made up* for public exhibition. The galleries would certainly lose much of their veneration for the theatrical kings, queens, and nobles, if they were to see them behind the scenes, unbedizened. [...] Chains of gold and silver are no less galling than fetters of iron.⁴⁶

In Hazlitt's account, our love affair with monarchy is pathological and regressive, a political and cultural infantilization redolent of backward Spain:

We make kings of men, and Gods of stocks and stones: we are not jealous of the creatures of our own hands. We only want a peg or loop to hang our idle fancies on, a puppet to dress up, a lay-figure to paint from. It is 'THING Ferdinand, and not KING Ferdinand', as it was wisely and wittily observed. (xix, 256)

Monarchy is a primitive cult of animism and superstition, an atavistic hangover that has no place in the grand march of the intellect. But in an unequal society, its fairy-tale promises keep us in 'mock-sublime' awe, simultaneously servile and fantasizing. Unlike Knox's invitation to visit the green room of the political theatre, Hazlitt declares that 'We ask only for the stage effect; we do not go behind the scenes, or it would go hard with many of our prejudices!' (ix, 256)⁴⁷ This depressing and seemingly defeatist analysis of mass delusion could have been motivated by Hazlitt's being forced to witness the growing popularity of George IV who had survived the Queen Caroline scandal intact. It was proving well-nigh impossible for the radical 'ophthalmist' to remove the gold-dust from the eyes of what Milton in *Eikonoclastes* called the 'image-doting rabble'.⁴⁸ However, a more optimistic assessment of 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' is possible if once again we consider the place of Hazlitt's writing in the pages of a radical periodical, in this case John Hunt's *The Liberal*, and if we return to the European context of radical politics.

46 Knox, *Spirit of Despotism*, 179. Compare Godwin: 'kings are always exhibited [...] they are carefully withdrawn from the profaneness of vulgar inspection' (*Political Justice*, 196). And Paine: 'what is called monarchy, always appears to me a silly, contemptible thing. I compare it to something kept behind a curtain, about which there is a great deal of bustle and fuss, and a wonderful air of seeming solemnity; but when by any accident the curtain happens to be open, and the company see what it is, they burst into laughter' (*The Rights of Man*, ed. Eric Foner [London: Penguin, 1984], 182).

47 In 'On the Regal Character' Hazlitt asserts that for self-obsessed monarchs the 'common drama of human life' is a 'fantoccini exhibition got up for their amusement' (vii, 285).

48 *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Vol III, 1648-1649*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 601.

The Liberal and European republicanism

As David Higgins has noted, *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* was probably named after the Spanish Liberales who governed Spain for three years after the Cadiz rebellion of 1820. The subtitle associated the journal with nationalist and revolutionary movements in the south of Europe, notably in Spain, Naples and Greece. These radical credentials were taken seriously enough by the literary establishment to provoke 'press hysteria', particularly when it emerged that the Hunts had recruited Byron to their cause.⁴⁹ In the Preface to the first volume, Hunt refuted allegations of sedition by declaring that the periodical eschewed explicit politics. At the same time, he makes clear that its focus on literature is a case of conducting republicanism by other means:

The object of our work is not political, except inasmuch as all writing now-a-days must involve something to that effect [...]. We wish to do our work quietly, if people will let us, – to contribute our liberalities in the shape of Poetry, Essays, Tales, Translations, and other amenities, of which kings themselves may read and profit, if they are not afraid of seeing their own faces in every species of inkstand.⁵⁰

The Hazlittian brio of the concluding metaphor reverses the process of monarchical hegemony: as Hazlitt showed in his essay 'On Court Influence' (1818), the 'mephitic' diffusion of royalist propaganda infected society from top to bottom through the channels of patronage and influence, a servile press and other media (vii, 235). It is playfully disingenuous of Hunt however to suggest that arts journalism is a 'quiet' revolution: the inclusion of the genre of the 'Essay' opens the door to political writing, and the bland designation 'Poetry' says nothing about the content of the texts and, just as importantly, their paratexts. Hence the naive reader taken in by these reassurances would have been shocked to find that Hunt's Preface was followed by the lead poem, Byron's satirical masterpiece *The Vision of Judgement*. This poem and 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' comprised a full-frontal assault on the reigning and previous monarch, and Hunt was prosecuted for libel.⁵¹ Byron's Preface to *The Vision of Judgement* dismisses the idealization of George III's private life and judges the late king on his political record:

[...] to attempt to canonise a Monarch, who, whatever were his household virtues, was neither a successful nor a patriot king, – inasmuch as several years of his reign passed in war with America and Ireland, to say nothing of the aggression upon France, – like all other exaggeration, necessarily begets opposition.⁵²

49 Higgins, *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine*, 115.

50 *The Liberal: Verse and Prose from the South* (London: John Hunt, 1822), vii.

51 See Tim Webb's entry on Hazlitt in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

52 George Gordon Byron, *The Vision of Judgement* (London: John Hunt, 1822), iii.

This is a massively important critique as it targets the domestication of the royal family, one of the myths of royal 'ordinariness' that begins in the Romantic period with 'Farmer George', flourishes in the reign of Queen Victoria, and continues to secure the popularity of the monarchy to the present day. Byron's use of poetic satire, redolent with the irreverent atmosphere of Hone and Cruikshank's pamphlets and a shining example of non-'right-royal' poetry, also refutes Colley's claim that anti-monarchical caricature had a benign effect on public opinion by focusing on the king's private life and ignoring the more fallible public role.⁵³

It can be argued therefore that Byron's presence in the same volume of *The Liberal* boosted the radical efficacy of Hazlitt's essay, despite the latter's 'stifling sense of mass loyalty'.⁵⁴ But it was the periodical's 'southern' European outlook which provided a more spectacular fillip for the republican decanonization of royal power. As already noted, the early 1820s saw a resurgence of nationalist movements in Italy and Greece: Hone claimed that Knox's text could contribute to the resistance to 'the revival and assertion of strongly despotic pretensions' in Italy.⁵⁵ Hazlitt's essay appeared just as radical energies were galvanized against the latest 'despotic' act, the Holy Alliance's plan to invade Spain and oust the Liberal government. Britain was uncomfortable with the policy but refused to intervene. This new apostasy brought the odious figure of Ferdinand back to centre stage. For Hazlitt and other liberals, Ferdinand was the *ne plus ultra* of Legitimacy. As he puts it in 'On the Spirit of Monarchy':

The line of distinction which separates the regal purple from the slabbering-bib is sometimes fine indeed: as we see in the case of the two Ferdinands. Any one above the rank of an idiot is supposed capable of exercising the highest functions of royal state. Yet these are persons who talk of the people as a swinish multitude, and taunt them with their want of refinement and philosophy. (xix, 260n)

By helping to restore Ferdinand for the second time in less than ten years, Britain had sold its soul again. For Hazlitt, the European monarchical system had reverted to type. He summed up his feelings in 'On the Pleasure of Hating', published in *The Plain Speaker*:

The echoes of liberty had awakened once more in Spain, and the morning of human hope dawned again; but that dawn has been overcast by the foul breath of bigotry, and those reviving sounds stifled by fresh cries from the time-rent towers of the Inquisition [...]. And England, that arch-reformer, that heroic deliverer, that mouther about liberty and tool of power, stands gaping by, not feeling the blight and mildew coming over it, nor its very bones crack

53 Colley, *Britons*, 213–14; Morris, *British Monarchy*, 174–80.

54 Gilmartin, *William Hazlitt*, 282.

55 Knox, *Spirit of Despotism*, vi.

and turn to a paste under the grasp and circling folds of this new monster, Legitimacy! (xii, 136)

This brings us back to where we began. Hazlitt's dystopian nightmare draws its imaginative energies from popular visual caricature and radical print culture: the Legitimate monster is both the Gothic Ferdinand and the dragon-like 'Legitimate Vampire' of Hone and Cruikshank's *The Political Showman – at Home* (1821).⁵⁶ The thorny question of Britain's more democratic monarchical system can be ducked by focusing only on its worst aspects, when it is in cahoots with its gory, despotic relatives. Monarchy represents social and political injustice: to present it in any other form is merely window-dressing.

Coda: radical afterlives

No critic has traced the afterlife of Hazlitt's anti-monarchical writings. This would be a valuable exercise as it would help to preserve the important if marginal current of republican thought in British political and cultural history.⁵⁷ To end this essay I want to make a modest contribution to this narrative by pointing out that 'On the Spirit of Monarchy' had a revival in popular-radical print culture in the late 1830s, the period of Chartism and the arrival of Victoria onto the throne. In the cheap, radical-satirical press there are several adverts for the essay. In the *Penny Satirist* for April 1836 'The Spirit of Monarchy' (note the title change) is advertised with Godwin's 'The Moral Effects of Aristocracy' for two pence, and the same advert appears in *Cleave's London Satirist and Gazette of Variety* in October 1837, just after Victoria's accession. The list of booksellers stocking the essay is a *Who's Who* of radical publishing, including James Watson, Abel Heywood, and Joshua Hobson. Hazlitt is now an actor in the still unwritten story of the radical satirical offensive against the new monarch. 'No reader of history can be a lover of kings' – or queens.

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⁵⁶ Gilmartin uses this image on the cover of *William Hazlitt*.

⁵⁷ See Anthony Taylor, *'Down with the Crown': British Anti-Monarchism and Debates about Royalty since 1790* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), and Richard Williams, *Contentious Crown: Public Discussion of the Monarchy in the Reign of Queen Victoria* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997).